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ABSTRACT

The Paracollege of St. Olaf College is an experimental program in which students participate in a self-directed study curriculum where no grades are given and students work at their own pace. This document presents the results of a study designed to find out what image is held of the Paracollege by those enrolled in the regular curriculum at St. Olaf, and what personal characteristics or other factors contributed to the formulation of that image. Several conclusions are made: (1) When students hold favorable or unfavorable impressions of the Paracollege, it is at least as much a function of their own educational preferences and personal characteristics and attitudes as it is of information or evidence about the effectiveness of specific features of the program. (2) If the Paracollege is to be expected to live up to its original charge to serve a cross-section of the St. Olaf student body, it will need to make a concerted effort to counter its developing image by deliberately attempting to attract the kinds of students who now view Paracollege as inappropriate for them. (3) Within the student body there is a diversity of educational preferences and styles that seem to suggest that more rather than fewer curricular options might be made available to students. (HS)

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The Paracollege Image: A Study of Students' Attitudes

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Originally the "raison d'etre" for an Office of Educational Research on the St. Olaf campus was to evaluate or assess the impacts of the Paracollege experiment. Clearly, the most crucial of those impacts are the ones that manifest themselves in the learning and development of students enrolled in that program; and the four-year longitudinal assessment now underway places its emphasis on learning what happens to students as a result of the Paracollege experience. But the experimental programs and units that have been established across the country have been found to have other impacts as well. Among these additional impacts are those which effect the functioning of the parent institutions in one way or another. And, insofar as these impacts on the parent institution are felt earlier and are more easily observable than are the educational impacts on students, it is they which have most often determined the fates of programs established in recent years.[1] For example, if a program has been said to be fiscally inefficient, thought to attract an "undesirable" type of student, or viewed as in any way incongruent with the objectives of the parent institution, it has been scuttled. Or if a program has been thought to be responsible for increasing the student applicant pool, enhancing an institution's prestige or attracting otherwise unattainable outside funds, it has been allowed to survive. To be sure,

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[1] Gaff, Jerry G. and Associates. The Cluster College. Jossey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, 1970.

these impacts are critical and may indeed be viable grounds for such decisive actions, especially if they really do jeopardize or enhance the educational program of the parent institution. The problem has not been so much that such decisions are premature -- that they fail to consider the more specifically educational impacts on students. Rather the problem is that the decisions have too often been based on the emerging "image" characteristics of the new programs without systematic assessment either of: 1) whether the "image" has any basis in fact, or 2) what have been the dynamics of the image-building process -- the features, events and attitudes that brought the image into being. In order to see how fraught with pitfalls this image-based decision making can be, especially in the case of new programs, let us consider for a moment what is known about the effects of college images.

Virtually all of the research on how students' college choices are made and much of the research describing college environments deals in one way or another with the concept of college image. [2] The term first came into use as a research concept to describe the process by which students self-select themselves into colleges on the basis of their assessment of the "fit" between themselves and the college environments. The picture or "image" to which students matched themselves was found to be derived from a variety of resources including college catalogues, admissions representatives, campus visits, information from friends, parents, teachers and high school

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[2] Feldman, K and T. Newcomb. The Impact of College on Students. Jossey-Bass Inc., San Francisco, 1968.

counselors and information from the mass media. And the importance of this process is underscored by the fact that research has consistently found that it is this overall image more often than any other specific reason for choice that determines which college a student will attend. Needless to say, there is invariably some misperception or misinformation involved in the process so that there is always some discrepancy between image and reality. But to the extent that a college's image over time becomes salient enough to attract a student body matched with it, the discrepancy is minimized and image has a way of becoming reality.

Though little research has been done on the images of experimental programs within larger institutions, the general phenomenon probably applies there also. That is, prospective students, current students, faculty and staff derive an image of a new program from their own sources of information filtered through their own perceptual biases. Since these programs are new -- in the

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[3] The following description of Likert-type scale items is reprinted from: Anastasi, Anne. Psychological Testing, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1954, p. 588

"Likert scaling procedure does not require the classification of items by a group of judges. Items are selected solely on the basis of internal consistency--. For this purpose, the preliminary list of statements is administered to a large number of subjects and the correlation of each item with the total score is determined."

"The Likert-type scale, moreover, calls for a graded response to each statement. The response is usually expressed in terms of the following five categories: strongly agree (S.A.), agree (A.), undecided (U.), disagree (D.), and strongly disagree (S.D.). The individual statements are either clearly favorable or clearly unfavorable. To score the scale, the alternative responses are credited 5,4,3,2 or 1, respectively, from the favorable to the unfavorable end. For example, "strongly agree" with a favorable statement would receive a score of 5, as would "strongly disagree" with an unfavorable statement. The sum of the item credits represents the individual's total score, which is interpreted in terms of empirically established norms."

formative stage and lacking a traditional image -- they are especially vulnerable to the image-building process. Such is the case with the Paracollege, and it is highly unlikely that those of us who have little or no direct involvement in it will be able to resist the temptation to make judgements about the viability of the Paracollege on the basis of its image. In fact, the investigation reported here was undertaken, in large part, because the researchers were puzzled by the many unsolicited and often conflicting judgements made about Paracollege in interviews with students and in conversations around the campus. It seemed worthwhile, therefore, to make a systematic effort to learn: 1) what features of the Paracollege are most frequently the focus of students' positive and negative judgements, and 2) to what extent a generally favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the Paracollege is related to other attitudes or characteristics of the persons making the judgements. In other words, it seemed worthwhile to attempt to learn what <u>is</u> the image of the Paracollege held by non-Paracollege students and what had been the dynamics of bringing that image into existence. With that information at least one would be in a somewhat better position to judge critically the claims that are made pro and con about the Paracollege.

The sample for the first phase of the research reported here was the panel of randomly selected sophomore students in the regular St. Olaf curriculum who are being studied through their four years at St. Olaf. (N = 267). It seemed wise to use this group rather than a specially selected cross-section of all classes because there was already a wealth of longitudinal data available on these students, including expressions of attitudes which, it was thought, might be related to attitudes toward the Paracollege. It should be remembered, however, that the sample does not include upper division students whose longer term experience at the college and generally greater maturity might have affected the attitudinal distributions reported.

A questionnaire completed by members of the sample during the month prior to their entrance to the freshman year included a number of items which attempted to get at pre-enrollment views of the Paracollege. Students were asked to describe their general attitudes toward the Paracollege, to indicate to what extent they might be interested in enrolling in the Paracollege and to list what they saw as the strong and weak points of the Paracollege program as they understood it from the information which has been made available to them prior to entrance. This information constituted the pre-enrollment "image" of the Paracollege for our purposes. In general the results of that survey indicated that the vast majority of entering students had neutral or favorable attitudes toward the Paracollege. Only 19% described their general attitude as "unfavorable" or "very unfavorable." Further, nearly 40% of the students enrolling in the regular St. Olaf curriculum for the first time indicated they had at least "some interest" in enrolling "in the Paracollege or a similar program." It was puzzling, however, to note that 30% of the entering students said they did not know enough about the Paracollege to know what their stance would be toward it, including 10% who claimed never to have heard of the Paracollege! The most frequently mentioned "advantage" of the Paracollege program was the opportunity it was seen to provide students to "follow their own interests", "develop their own educational plans", or "work at their own pace." A large number of other students phrased what is probably the same feature in negative terms such as, "eliminates unnecessary distribution requirements" or "avoids rigid requirements." A sizable minority mentioned the absence of grades and/or competition and nearly ¼ saw the potential for close student-faculty-contact as the primary advantage.

The most frequently named disadvantage was something which might not be seen as a feature of the Paracollege program at all but as the opposite side of the coin of that feature most frequently cited as an advantage. That is,

a good many students, including many who claimed to have a "favorable" attitude toward the Paracollege, indicated that they didn't feel they had the "discipline" or weren't "self-motivated" enough to handle "the freedom" of the program. Others were concerned about how openly graduate and professional schools would accept experimental college graduates. And still others said they needed periodic feedback on their academic progress which they felt would be lacking in the Paracollege presumably because there are no grades and/or courses. And, finally, about 10% of the students expressed concern that being in the Paracollege might set them apart from the rest of the St. Olaf community or interfere with their involvement in campus-wide activities.

These, then, constituted the pre-enrollment bases for students' attitudes toward the Paracollege experiment--the pre-enrollment "image" if you will. As the year wore on, it was clear that some of these image characteristics--especially the reservations about graduate school admission and lack of feedback on academic progress--persisted in the comments made by students about the Paracollege in interviews. It was also clear, however, that other image characteristics, not prominent at entrance, were developing on the basis of post-enrollment observations. Though no attempt was made to categorize or quantify these, it seemed to the researchers that the greatest increase came in the number of comments made about the personal characteristics of Paracollege students and faculty and the way those characteristics "fit" with the image held of the Paracollege structure and/or learning styles. In other words, the primary sources of information about the Paracollege had changed from descriptive brochures to people and direct or indirect contacts with them. The following remarks from student interviews in January of the freshman year illustrate this change in focus from program alone to fit between program and persons.

> "Sometimes I think I would have been happier in something like the Paracollege. I mean, I've just never been a 'learn on schedule' type person, and Paracollege students learn what they want when they want to."

Or, on the other hand,

> "Even if I did want that kind of freedom I wouldn't like Paracollege . . . You have to be radical to fit in socially there."

As a result of these and similar comments, the investigators decided to include, in a questionnaire administered to the full research panel in May of the freshman year, a more comprehensive set of scaleable items designed to measure, in combination, a generally favorable or unfavorable stance toward the Paracollege. An effort was made to write some items which would call for a judgement only about the structures or methods of the Paracollege and others which allowed judgements about the perceived attitudes and personal characteristics or styles of persons involved in the Paracollege. Obviously some items (e.g. those concerning perceived student-faculty relationships) dealt with both. And most of both types of items asked students to compare the Paracollege with the regular St. Olaf program. All were phrased as statements and students were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each item on a five-point Lickert scale.[3] Examples of the items are:

> "As far as preparation for graduate or professional school is concerned, the regular St. Olaf curriculum is probably better than Paracollege."
>
> "Most Paracollege students work just as hard as regular St. Olaf students do."

and,

> "Paracollege faculty take a greater interest in students' academic problems than most regular St. Olaf faculty do."[4]

One hundred ninety-six, or 73% of the original 267 regular St. Olaf students in the sample responded to the Spring questionnaire. Data presented in the remainder of this report are from 184 regular St. Olaf students who answered all of the "Paracollege image" scale items.

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[3] Refer to footnote on page 3.

[4] All image items on the questionnaire are listed in Appendix A of this report.

There were 18 image items on the questionnaire. Since there had been no opportunity to pre-test the items, and since it seemed desirable to learn which items and/or features most clearly distinguished a generally favorable or unfavorable stance toward the Paracollege, a factor analysis was run to cull the "weak" items. Factor analysis is a statistical technique designed to clarify and refine a scaled dimension by tracing clusters or patterns of inter-relationship of responses and assigning weights to individual items on the basis of their "contribution" to the dimension being measured. Items receiving the heaviest weightings discriminate best the dimension and, therefore, define most accurately what is actually being measured by the scale.

The results of the factor analysis--that is, the patterns discernable in the relative weighting of various scale items--was in itself an interesting finding. In general that finding was that, although the scale created did indeed measure a kind of "favorableness" of attitude toward the Paracollege, the components of that attitude were not exactly what had been expected by the researchers.[5] Eliminated from the scale with low weightings (i.e. because they did not discriminate a range of responses) were <u>all</u> of the items to which a response of "agree" or "strongly agree" would have denoted a negative judgement about some feature of the Paracollege structure. Retained in the scale were those items to which a response of agreement would have denoted a preference for arrangements in the regular St. Olaf curriculum. In other words, most students had been reluctant to make negative judgements about the Paracollege structure,

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[5] The use of the term "finding" here should not be interpreted as a result of statistical analysis not reported. Rather it is a judgement made by the researchers about the implications of the results of the factor analysis on the basis of patterns of item content.

but were quite willing to show the range of their opinions about features of the regular curriculum. Presumably this would have something to do with their greater familiarity with the program in which they were enrolled; but it also suggested that few regular St. Olaf students had any quarrel with the structural features of Paracollege. However, when the items asked for judgements not about structures but about Paracollege students, the pattern reversed itself. Students were quite willing to demonstrate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with statements such as, "Quite a few students go into Paracollege just so they can slough-off in their work." This finding seemed to support our earlier observations that after enrollment, students' images of the Paracollege are based more on observations of people than on structural features.

Nevertheless it seemed, by any exercise of logic, that the scale derived was really measuring two separate attitudes: one's approval of traditional educational arrangements on the one hand, and one's skepticism about the academic style of Paracollege students on the other. Yet the factor analysis showed clearly that by its criteria the two were so closely related as to be indistinguishable. (The factor analysis produced no other "factor" or cluster.) That is, the same students who were skeptical about Paracollege students were those who showed the strongest preference for traditional educational arrangements. An internal check in the available data made it possible to see whether the scale based on this combination of attitudes could really be said to discern favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the Paracollege.

The sample of students was divided into three equal size groups according to High, Middle and Low scorers on the scale which we decided, tentatively, to call the Paracollege Image Scale. High scorers were those who had most consistently stated a preference for traditional educational arrangements and a skepticism about Paracollege students. Low scorers were those most critical of traditional arrangements and most favorably disposed toward Paracollege students. A frequency distribution of responses was run for each

of the groups on a non-scale item from the questionnaire which asked directly, "In general, how would you describe your attitude toward the Paracollege?" The responses to that question for High, Middle and Low scoring groups on the Paracollege Image Scale are seen on Table 8.1.

TABLE 8.1

Percentage Distributions of Responses of High, Middle and Low Scoring Groups to: "In general how would you describe your attitude toward the Paracollege?"

	High	Mid	Low
Very favorable	1.6	11.1	29.5
Favorable	17.7	23.8	47.5
Neutral or Mixed feelings	56.1	58.7	23.0
Unfavorable	18.0	3.2	---
Very unfavorable	4.9	---	---

Clearly the figures demonstrate that a student's score on the Paracollege Image scale is very highly correlated with his consciously held attitude toward the Paracollege. Note that while 77% of the Low scorers claim a favorable stance toward the Paracollege and none claims an unfavorable stance, only 19% of the High scoring group claim a favorable stance and 23% consciously claim an unfavorable attitude. Thus it appears that although most students are reluctant to respond in a negatively critical way to specific features of the Paracollege structure, a large number are willing to respond in defense of traditional arrangements and in criticism of the perceived style of Paracollege students. And the more consistently one responds in the latter pattern, the more likely one is to admit to have a "mixed" or "unfavorable" attitude toward the Paracollege. Given this as the basis for a student's overall attitude toward the Paracollege, it seemed likely to the researchers that High, Middle and Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale would differ from one another in their responses to other items from the Spring questionnaire as well. More specifically, we hypothesized, High scorers might be expected to have not only quite different educational objectives than Low scorers, but might also be found to differ most

from Paracollege students and Low scorers on other measures of attitudes and educational preferences. In other words, we hypothesized that those students who hold an unfavorable attitude toward Paracollege are those whose personal styles are most different from those of students in the Paracollege and this would explain both their preference for traditional structures and their disapproval of Paracollege students. Before turning to these questions, however, let us return for a moment to students responses to specific items on the Paracollege Image Scale.

It was indicated earlier that several of the original items on the scale were eliminated in the factor analysis. This is surely not to say, however, that the eliminated items were of no value in the research. Indeed, the reason that some items were eliminated from the scale was that they elicited such uniformity of response in one direction or another that they did not help to refine an otherwise favorable or unfavorable stance. In a sense, then, these items distinguish the most salient "image" characteristics of the Paracollege--the features about which there is most agreement among students.

For example, only 4% of the students in the total sample disagreed with the statement, "It is my impression that Paracollege students develop closer working relationships with faculty members than students in the regular St. Olaf program do." Indeed, more than 1/3 (mostly High scorers) responded "neutral or don't know", but practically none quarrelled with the idea that the objectives of the tutor-tutee relationship are being achieved.

Similarly, only 12% of the sample disagreed with the statement, "As a rule, Paracollege students seem to be more independent and outspoken than most regular St. Olaf students." In this case, only 25% took a neutral stance and 63% agreed or strongly agreed. Thus, though the item was eliminated from the scale, it shows again that at least one aspect of the Paracollege image has to do with the presumed personal characteristics of its students. In this case the

characteristics named apparently were ones which most students could attribute to Paracollege students regardless of their general stance toward the program.

Finally, two other eliminated items shed some light on the views many students hold of the structural features of Paracollege. On the one hand, a sizeable majority of students agreed that, "Paracollege provides a better opportunity for concentrating on a major area of study than the regular St. Olaf program does." At the same time, there was no such confidence demonstrated in that program's ability to "develop breadth of interests or a good general education." Apparently freshmen in the regular St. Olaf program, occupied themselves with the breadth phase of their education, view the freedom of Paracollege as freedom to concentrate one's interests, but with the attendant risk of neglecting the breadth aspect.

In any case, it is clear that some aspects of the Paracollege image are "real" -- in the sense that they are shared by most students. It has been demonstrated earlier, however, that students disagree with regard to other potential image characteristics and that the view one holds toward these is related, among other things, to one's satisfaction with traditional educational arrangements. In the section of the report that follows we will examine the educational views of students who scored High, Middle and Low on the Paracollege Image Scale.

Section 2: Educational Objectives and Preferences of High, Middle and Low Scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale

In addition to the educational preference items already mentioned as part of the Paracollege Image Scale, the Spring questionnaire also included several non-scale items on educational goals and objectives. Among these are questions which attempt to clarify the process of choosing a major, assess the changing educational goals and objectives of students, specify the activities which students see as useful in attaining those objectives and measure the degree

of satisfaction students say they receive from features of their current programs. Before looking at the responses to these items by each group, however, let us examine the three groups--High, Middle, and Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale--on other measures, to see whether they differ from one another in some obvious ways which might explain their differences in educational preferences.

Table 8.2 shows the mean scores on SAT verbal, SAT math, normalized high school class rank and first year Grade Point Average for the three groups. Tests of statistical significance showed that on none of these measures did the groups differ significantly from one another. Similarly, there were no differences among the groups in the majors they had chosen by the end of their freshman year, except that while about ¼ of the Middle scorers and 1/3 of the Low scorers had not yet chosen a major, only 9% of the High scoring group was still undecided, suggesting that those students with unfavorable attitudes toward Paracollege are more likely as freshmen to have clear-cut educational plans and, perhaps, vocational plans as well.

TABLE 8.2

Mean SAT Scores, High School Class Ranks and First Year G.P.A. for High, Middle and Low Scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale

	High (N=61)	Middle (N=62)	Low (N=61)	Total Sample
SAT-Verbal	574	591	600	587
SAT-Math	610	628	605	613
High School Class Rank (Normalized on SAT scale)	660	670	652	658
First Year St. Olaf G.P.A.	2.97	2.98	2.92	2.95

And, finally, a series of questions about satisfactions in relationships with faculty showed no differences among the groups. Students were asked to estimate the proportion of faculty at St. Olaf who they would consider "superior" teachers, who they see as showing interest in students academic problems and in "students lives outside the classroom", and "who they know well

enough to talk with about matters unrelated to school or course-work." It was thought that these items might uncover a source of the High scoring students' satisfaction with traditional arrangements, but such was not the case. In fact, the response figures showed that larger numbers of Low scoring students than High had been pleased with these aspects of their relationships with faculty, though the differences were not statistically significant.

How, then, are the differences in educational preferences uncovered by the Paracollege Image Scale manifested in student's responses to other items about education? The items which showed significant differences among the three groups indicate that the basic difference may be that while Low scoring students claim to be educationally motivated by intrinsic interests in subject matter and prefer independence in pursuing those interests, High scoring students are oriented to extrinsic rewards and goals and prefer greater prescription in achieving them. Data presented in the third section of the report suggest that these motivational differences are, in turn, related to how personally autonomous one is and whether one's basic orientation is to a flexible present or a stable future.

The most broadly stated example of this was seen in the responses to an item which asked students to select from a list of commonly stated educational objectives the two they considered most important in their education. Significantly more High scoring students (56%) than Low scoring students (23%) named "Acquire vocational training, develop skills and techniques directly applicable to my career." On the other hand, significantly more Low scoring students (58%) than High scoring students (30%) named "Acquire and use the skills and habits involved in critical and constructive thinking."

Again at the level of general educational outlook, Table 8.3 shows that students in the three groups also differ significantly from one another in the extent to which they desire freedom to follow their own interests in pursuing the content of an education. It should be noted, however, that when the total sample is considered, a majority claim to reject the idea of a "body of knowledge to be learned" and only ½ of even the High scoring students subscribe to that prescription for the liberally educated man.

However, the data in Table 8.4 seem to indicate that most students reject only the idea that there exists a body of knowledge which an educated man must know -- not the idea that within a given field there should be guidance or prescription. And it is at this level of in-course prescription

TABLE 8.3

Percentage Distributions of Responses of High, Middle and Low Scoring Students to an item that asked Which of Two Educational Views "comes closer to your own."

Educational View	High	Middle	Low
Students should be given very great freedom in choosing their subjects of study and in choosing their own areas of interest within those subjects.	48.2	60.3	81.9
There is a body of knowledge to be learned, and the faculty is more competent than the student to direct the student's course of study, through required courses, prerequisites, and the like	48.5	38.1	16.4
No answer	3.3	1.6	1.7

that the High, Middle, and Low scorers on the Paracollege Image scale part company most clearly. While large majorities of the High and Middle scorers expect or prefer course assignments that are "definite" and prescribed, more than 3/4 of the Low scorers prefer "assignments where the topic or approach is left up to me."

TABLE 8.4

Percentage Distributions of Type of Class Assignments Preferred by High, Middle and Low Scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale

Type of Assignment Preferred	High	Middle	Low
I prefer definite assignments	77.0	66.7	21.4
I prefer assignments where topic, approach, etc. are left up to me.	21.4	31.7	76.8
No answer	1.6	1.6	1.6

An indication that the groups are differentially motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic rewards came from a series of questions about grading. When students were asked, "How do you feel about competing with other students for grades and recognition?"; 86% of the Low scoring

group responded that they "dislike it", while only 40% of the High scoring group so answered. On the other hand, none of the Low scoring group said they liked it, even "somewhat", while 32% of the High scoring group said they did.

Another item asked, "If you had to choose between earning superior grades or expressing your true feelings, ideas or knowledge, even when they contradict the professor's, which would you choose?" As might be expected, a majority of each group responded that they would opt for "expressing their true feelings, etc." But while only 8% of the Low scoring group opted for grades, 37% of the High scoring group did so, indicating that for a significant minority of that group "making the grade" is a high priority goal.

And, finally, there were significant differences also among the groups in the campus activities they named as providing the highest degree of satisfaction in attaining educational goals. While significantly greater numbers of High scoring students named "coursework in the field of major" and "athletics", significantly greater numbers of Low scoring students named "individual study or research," "getting acquainted with faculty members," and "individual artistic or literary work."

In a parallel item which asked students to name the chief interests or activities of their closest friends, significantly more High scorers said "dating and social life" and "athletics", and significantly more Low scorers said "outdoor activities such as hiking, etc." There were no differences among the groups in the proportions who named "studying for formal academic work" and "intellectual discussions or 'rap' sessions."

Overall, then, it appears that there are indeed differences in the self-reported educational views of High, Middle, and Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale. Yet these differences do not appear to be related to academic aptitude as measured by the SAT. Neither do they appear to be a reflection

of differential rates of "success" in past or current academic work, since there were no differences among the groups in high school class rank or grades earned at St. Olaf. What do seem to be the bases for the distinctions are: 1) a basically different orientation to the purposes or functions of a higher education, and 2) differences in personal styles preferred in pursuing that education. More specifically, High scorers view education as a fairly clear-cut, well-established and basically unchanging means to an end--a future oriented life style plan or a specific vocation. Since for them the future is viewed as relatively stable, both personally and for their society, they see their educational task as mastering a distinct package of skills and information and they are, therefore, eager to know what has been learned in the areas related to their life plans and willing to rely on the expertise of those who have preceded them. Low scorers, on the other hand, are less likely to have specific future plans in mind. And, as will be seen, most do not view the future as stable and/or unchanging. Consequently their attitudes are more present-oriented and they see education as an end in itself--though it will almost certainly lead to something "good." And since knowledge, like all else, is in a state of flux, Low scorers see themselves as rightfully taking a more active role in the process; hence the lesser concern for maintaining established ways and the greater concern for individual research, literary, or artistic work. (It might also be noted that while 88% of the Low scorers said "Students should participate significantly in the content and organization of courses, academic policy making and matters of this sort," only 32% of the High scorers agreed.) Thus it is understandable that High scoring students would be indifferent to or unfavorably impressed by a college program which challenges the educational status quo. And it is equally understandable that Low scoring students might be uncritically enamored with that same program for the same reason. Indeed, data not presented here indicate that the students who score low on the Paracollege

Image scale and who claim to have a "favorable" or "very favorable" attitude toward the Paracollege at the end of their freshman year are those who share the educational preferences held by students who are actually enrolled in the Paracollege.

In a report prepared previously by this Office, it was found that the educational preferences held by students at entrance to college were related to their views on social and political issues and appeared to be rooted in basic personality differences measured by the Omnibus Personality Inventory.[6] The final section of this report examines these views and characteristics by the groups of High, Middle, and Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale in an effort to learn whether persons who hold generally favorable or unfavorable views toward the Paracollege may be characterized by other than their educational preferences.

Section 3: Personality Characteristics and other Attitudes of High, Middle, and Low Scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale.

It will be recalled from Report 5 in the series describing the Class of 1974 at entrance that Paracollege students were found to differ significantly as a group from their peers in the regular St. Olaf program on six of the fourteen scales of the Omnibus Personality Inventory. More specifically, they scored higher on the Thinking Introversion, Theoretical Orientation, Estheticism, and Complexity scales which, in combination, comprise the elements of what the Inventory authors call "Intellectual Disposition." The IDC concept allows for "...an identification of students

[6] Farland, Ronnald W. and Stephen M. Bragg. "Personality Characteristics of Entering Freshmen as Determinants of Attitudes and Opinions", Office of Educational Research, St. Olaf College, Northfield, June, 1971.

who range in types from those with broad intrinsic interests in intellectual pursuits (High IDC levels) to those with limited or restricted orientations in the area of cognitive learning (Low IDC levels). Where the former seek out and become involved in a variety of perceptual and learning experiences, with considerable emphasis given to the literary and esthetic spheres, the latter are notable for their pragmatic and non-intellectual concerns, both in the immediate learning situation and in the later utilization of their knowledge and skills.[7] In addition, Paracollege students were found to be significantly more "autonomous" and significantly less "practical and materialistic" on scales measuring those characteristics.

In light of the earlier conclusion that regular St. Olaf students who are Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale share the educational views of students enrolled in the Paracollege, it is more than a little interesting to note on Figure 8.1 that they also differ from High scorers on the same scales of the OPI on which Paracollege students were found to differ from the regular St. Olaf student body as a group! In addition to expressing the same tendency to have "broad intrinsic interests in intellectual pursuits", measured by the first four scales, they also score significantly higher on the Autonomy scale which measures "a tendency to be independent of authority as traditionally imposed through social institutions." According to the authors' definition of that scale, "they oppose infringements on the rights of individuals, and are tolerant of the viewpoints of others; they tend to be realistic intellectually, and much less judgemental than low scorers."[8] High scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale, on the other hand, score significantly higher on the Practical Outlook scale of the

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[7] Heist, Paul and George Yonge. Omnibus Personality Inventory Manual: New York: The Psychological Corporation, 1968. p. 24.

[8] Ibid. p. 5.

OPI (in contrast to both Paracollege students and Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale.) Again, according to the scale definition, this means that they are "more interested in practical, applied activities and tend to value material possessions and concrete accomplishments. The criterion most often used by them to evaluate ideas and things is one of immediate utility."[9]

But Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale also differ from High scorers on two scales which did not distinguish Paracollege students from their peers in the regular St. Olaf curriculum. First, they are

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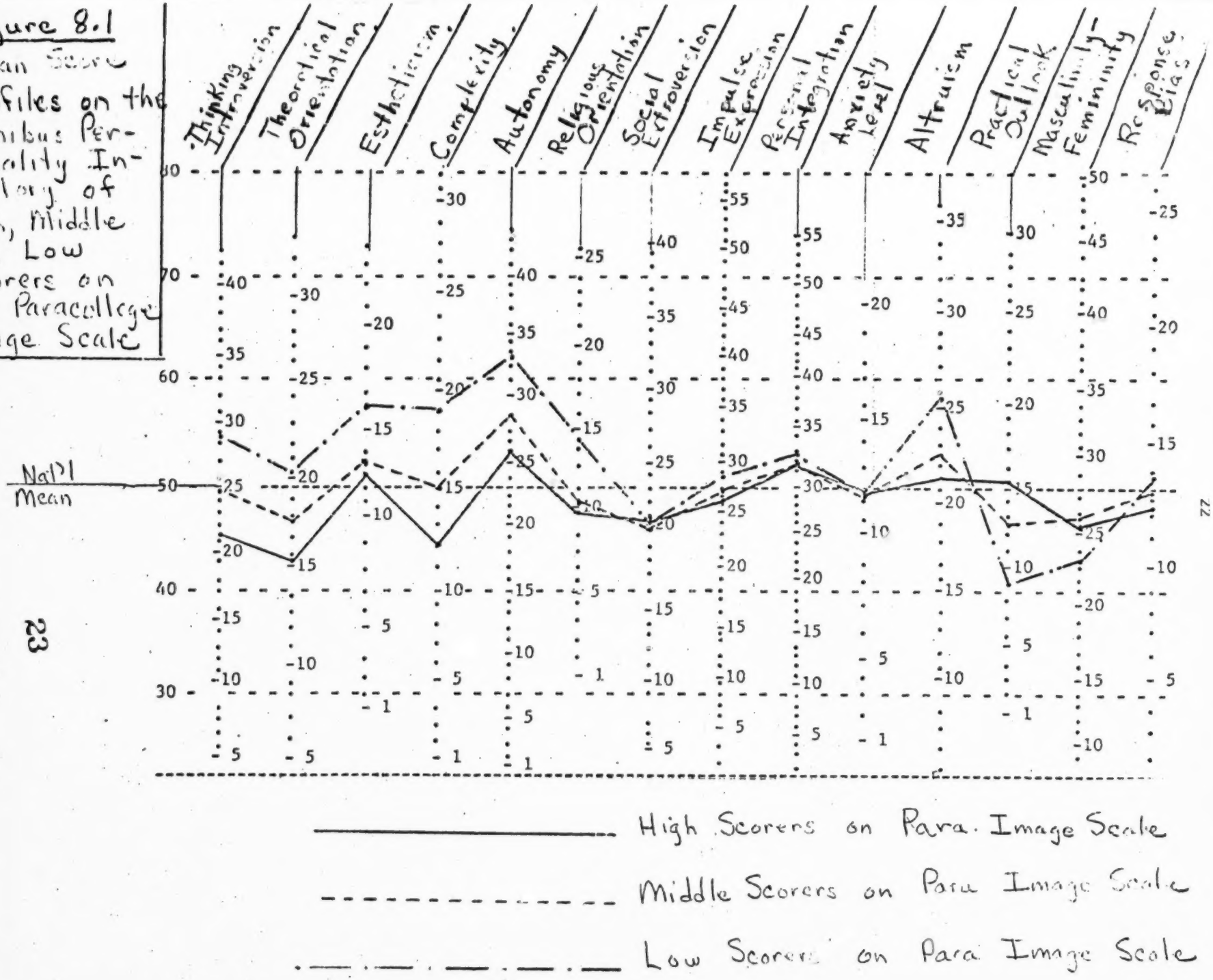
[9] Ibid. p. 5.

Figure 8.1
Mean Score Profiles on the Omnibus Personality Inventory of High, Middle and Low Scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale



significantly more likely than either Middle or High scorers to be "skeptical of conventional religious beliefs, especially those which are orthodox or fundamentalistic in nature."[10] At the same time, they score significantly higher on the Altruism scale, indicating that they are "affiliative, trusting, and ethical in relations with others, exhibiting strong concern for the feelings and welfare of people they meet,"[11] In line with the former description, it is interesting to note on Table 8.5 that students in the three comparison groups differ significantly in self-descriptions of their present religious beliefs also. While over 90%

TABLE 8.5

Distributions of Percent Responses to "Which of the following most closely describes your religious beliefs?" By High, Middle and Low Scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale

Response *	High	Middle	Low
Lutheran	70.5	49.2	29.5
Other Protestant	19.7	17.5	21.3
Roman Catholic	1.6	4.8	---
No religious beliefs	---	4.8	14.7
No formal religion	3.3	15.9	27.9
Other	4.9	---	---
No answer	---	7.8	6.6

* The categories presented in the Table have been "collapsed" from specific designations made by students.

of the High scorers claim a Protestant affiliation, only 51% of the Low do so. Note also that the significantly different cells are those which indicate that over 70% of the High scorers but only 29% of the Low scorers claim a Lutheran affiliation, while there are no differences among the groups in the proportions of "other Protestants." But the telling difference comes in the cells which indicate a skepticism about or outright rejection of organized religion. While 43% of the Low scorers fall into those categories, only 3% of the High scorers do. This would seem to be not only consistent with the differences in scores on the Religious Orientation scale of the OPI, but congruent with the earlier stated interpretation that

[10] Ibid. p. 5.

[11] Ibid. p. 5.

Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale are generally more skeptical of existing social institutions. (See Report 1 for evidence that students responding "No formal religion," are not necessarily non-religious but are skeptical of "organized religion.") Another indication of this was seen in an item which asked students to name their political affiliations. While 63% of the High scorers named one or the other of the major political parties (49% Republican), only 22% (8% Republican) of the Low scorers did, with 71% opting for "Independent."

The Autonomy scale defines High scorers on that scale as "opposed to infringements on the rights of others", "more tolerant of the views of others", and "less judgemental." The Altruism scale defines High scorers on that scale as "exhibiting strong concern for the feelings and welfare of people they meet." Since Low scorers on the Paracollege Image Scale scored significantly higher on both of these than did High scorers, it is interesting to note that while 95% of the Low scorers indicated that they are "in favor" of "Recent Supreme Court decisions upholding civil rights," only 41% of the High scorers so responded, with the remainder being "neutral" or "against" those decisions. What is probably the same attitude syndrome came across in students' responses to the question, "Do you feel that homosexual acts between consenting adults are immoral?" While nearly ½ of the High scorers and 1/3 of the Middle scorers responded "Yes", only 10% of the Low scorers did.

There were also differences among High, Middle and Low scorers on a series of items dealing with the concept of freedom of speech and dissent. On none of these did a majority of any group stand in opposition to the concept, but differences in the distributions were significant. For example, while only 6% of the Low scorers said they were "against" "Non violent civil disobedience as a form of dissent," 40% of the

High scorers said they were. Similarly, 88% of the Low scorers disagreed with the statement, "Legislative committees should investigate the political beliefs of college faculty members," and the remaining 12% said they were undecided. But 22% of the High scorers agreed with the statement, 20% more were "undecided" and the remaining 58% disagreed. And, finally, the groups' responses to the statement, "A person who advocates unpopular actions or holds unpopular ideas, no matter how extreme, should be allowed to speak to students on the campus" are seen in Table 8.6. Note that while virtually

TABLE 8.6

Percent Distributions of Responses to "A person who advocates unpopular actions or holds unpopular ideas, no matter how extreme, should be allowed to speak to students on the campus."

	High	Middle	Low
Strongly agree	11.6	28.6	55.7
Agree	44.1	49.2	34.5
Neutral or don't know	18.3	17.5	4.8
Disagree	25.0	4.8	4.8
Strongly disagree	3.2	---	---

all of the Low scoring students on the Paracollege Image Scale view freedom of speech as applying to the campus scene without reservation, only 57% of the High scorers do. And 28% of the latter group disagree with the statement altogether.

Clearly, then, the educational views and preferences expressed by students at the end of one year of college are not developed independent of previously existing attitudes, and commitments in areas of life which, on the surface, may appear to be unrelated to learning. Indeed, the fact that patterns of such attitudes are reflected in measurable personality dimensions is evidence that they may be rooted in quite basic and diverse value priorities and approaches to the organization of experience. More important for purposes of the present project, the differences apparently are significantly related to the images these students hold of the Paracollege at St. Olaf. Let us review, in summary, the chronology of that image development.

First, it has been shown that prior to entrance to the freshman year over 80% of St. Olaf students hold neutral or favorable attitudes toward the Paracollege. At that point in time their images of that program focused on structural features described in admission literature A surprisingly large proportion of entering students apparently were not well informed about the Paracollege at all, but those that were were most favorably disposed to the opportunity Paracollege had been described as providing for individualizing educational programs, though many recognized that they personally had no need for or lacked the discipline to benefit from that individualization. Their reservations centered also on such things as whether Paracollege membership would hinder their chances for graduate school admission or limit their involvement in campus-wide activities and social life.

After a year in residence on the campus on which Paracollege was actually operating, however, there are some interesting developments in the ways regular St. Olaf students describe Paracollege. Some pre-enrollment image characteristics persist, such as the reservation about graduate school admission. And there is still, after one year, a reluctance on the part of students to be negatively critical of the educational principles upon which the Paracollege structure rests. In fact, nearly all regular St. Olaf students in the sample believe that the tutor-tutee arrangement of the Paracollege does provide closer student-faculty relationships and a large majority view the Paracollege as providing a "better" opportunity to develop one's special interests, albeit with the possible risk of neglecting breadth education. But there is also an increased tendency in the first year of college for regular St. Olaf students to describe the Paracollege in terms of the "fit" between the program and the perceived styles of students in it. That is, many regular St. Olaf students attribute to Paracollege students, rightly or wrongly, a set of characteristics and styles which are viewed as "appropriate" to features of the Paracollege program. For

some the image of students and the image of the Paracollege apparently are one in the same. And the data presented here suggest that to the extent that a regular St. Olaf student exhibits attitudes and preferences similar to Paracollege students, to that extent is he likely to hold a favorable attitude toward the Paracollege in general. On the other hand, a student who exhibits attitudes and preferences unlike those of Paracollege students is likely to prefer traditional educational arrangements and to admit to having "mixed" or unfavorable attitudes toward the Paracollege.

Research conducted previously by the Office of Educational Research has found that students self-select into the Paracollege on the basis of several dimensions of interests, attitudes and personal characteristics. The present report suggests that regular St. Olaf students are "aware" of that self-selection, although their descriptive terms may be different from those of the research. And insofar as students perceptions of the dynamics of that self-selection process become an important way of describing the Paracollege, that part of the Paracollege image is likely to become reality in that only students who fit the perceived pattern will bother to apply to the program. Indeed a study of the characteristics of regular St. Olaf students who have transferred into the Paracollege after a semester or more in the regular program shows that almost without exception those students are different from their regular college peers on the same dimensions as are Paracollege students at entrance.

What, then, has been learned from this study of students' images of the Paracollege? First, it has been shown that when students hold favorable or unfavorable impressions of the Paracollege it is at least as much a function of their own educational preferences and personal characteristics and attitudes as it is of information or evidence about the effectiveness of specific features of the program. Thus one should exercise caution in making judgements about

the viability of the Paracollege on the basis of student opinions alone. Second, the data suggest that if the Paracollege is to be expected to live up to its original charge to serve a cross-section of the St. Olaf student body -- in the fullest sense of that term -- it will need to make a concerted effort to counter its developing image by deliberately attempting to attract the kinds of students who now view Paracollege as inappropriate for them. Third, it is clear that the common admissions criteria such as SAT and class rank do not discriminate the diversity of educational styles that make for appropriate selection to special programs. And finally, the data surely suggest that within the student body there is a diversity of educational preferences and styles which seem to suggest that more rather than fewer curricular options might be made available to students.

APPENDIX A

Below are the items originally written for inclusion in the development of the Paracollege Image scale. Those marked with an asterisk are those which were actually included in the factor analysis. The six marked with two asterisks are those which received the heaviest weighting in the analysis and, consequently, "define" the dimension.

49. Using the key below, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with the following statements. (Put one number in each blank.)

1 = Strongly agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral or don't know
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly disagree

* a) It is my impression that Paracollege students develop closer working relationships with faculty members than students in the regular St. Olaf program do.

* b) Generally Paracollege students stick together and won't have much to do with students in the regular St. Olaf program.

* c) There is about the same range of personalities and attitudes among Paracollege students that there is among students in the regular St. Olaf program.

** d) As far as developing breadth of interests or getting a good general education, the regular St. Olaf program is preferable.

* e) It appears to me that students in the Paracollege usually develop closer or deeper relationships with one another than students in the regular St. Olaf program do.

** f) Quite a few students go into the Paracollege just so they can slough-off in their work.

** g) In terms of preparation for graduate or professional schools, the regular St. Olaf program is probably better than Paracollege.

* h) Paracollege provides a better opportunity for concentrating on a major area of study than the regular St. Olaf program does.

* i) Paracollege faculty take a greater interest in students' academic problems than most regular St. Olaf faculty do.

j) I would like to be a student in the Paracollege.

* k) The Paracollege policy of allowing students to create their own majors is going to cause a lot of problems come graduation time.

* l) As a rule, Paracollege students seem to be more independent and outspoken than regular St. Olaf students.

** m) Paracollege allows more freedom than one really needs in his education.

** n) It would be my guess that regular college students acquire more knowledge in a year than Paracollege students do.

** o) Most Paracollege students work just as hard as regular St. Olaf students do.

50. In general, how would you describe your attitude toward the Paracollege?

1. Very favorable
2. Favorable
3. Neutral or mixed feelings
4. Unfavorable
5. Very unfavorable